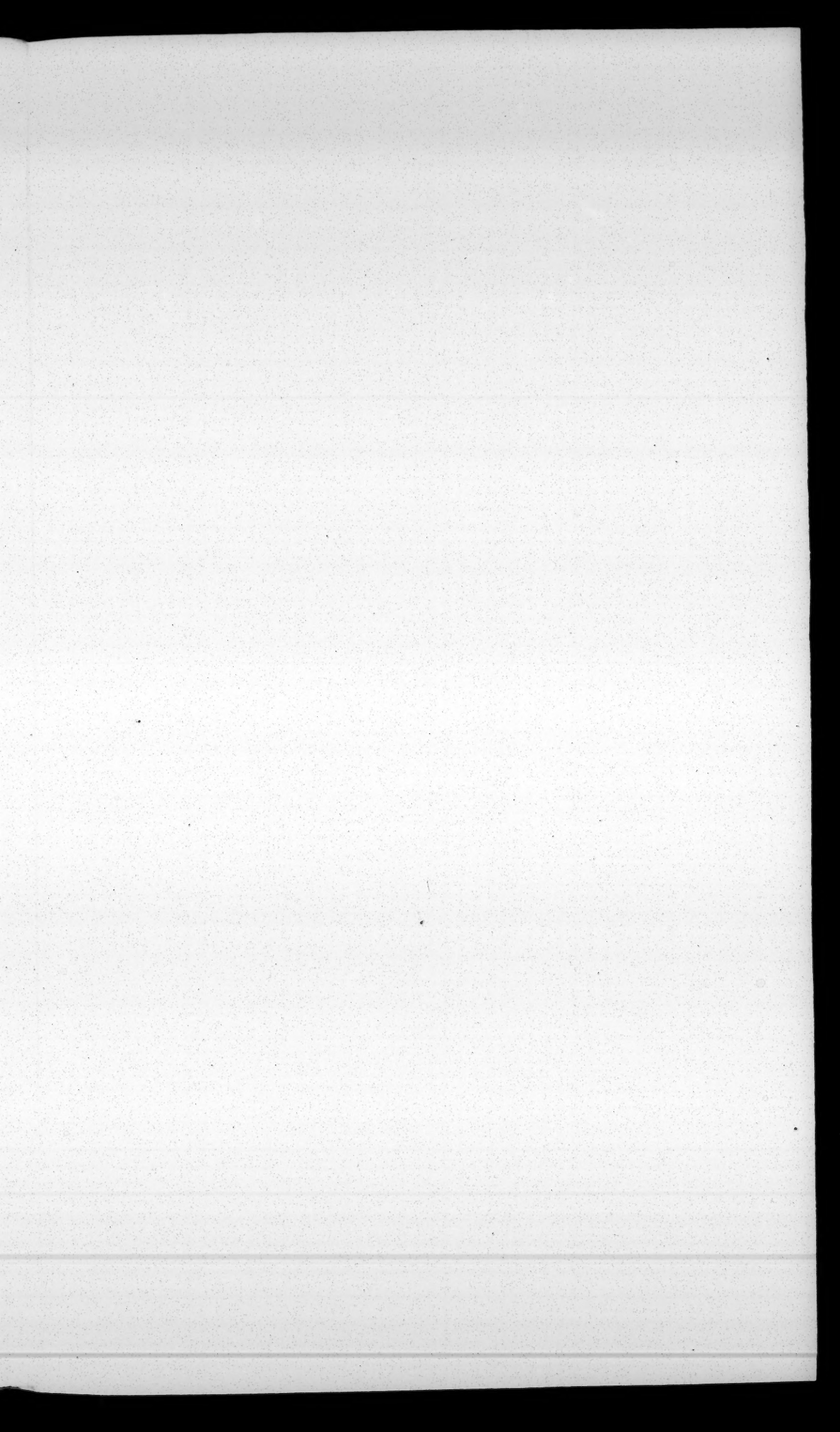




OBSERVATIONS

ON A PAMPHLET, ENTITLED,

THOUGHTS ON THE CAUSE

OF THE

PRESENT DISCONTENTS.

BY

CATHARINE MACAULAY.

Assume a virtue, if you have it not.

SHAKESPEARE.

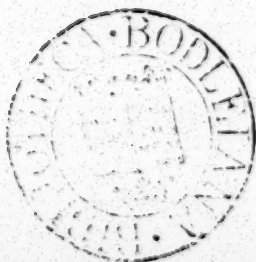
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OBSERVATIONS, &c.

IT is an undertaking of the highest difficulty as well as delicacy to point out the corruptions or mistakings of men, whose disappointed ambition has led them to offer their services to an alarmed and enraged populace, and whose abilities of character and situation promise a successful exertion in the cause of opposition. In important parts of duty, every consequence which relates to self is to be hazarded ; on this consideration, I will ever, notwithstanding the
long

long and malevolent persecution I have endured from the interested part of mankind for a work written on the general principles of honest policy, in all great points of national welfare, express my genuine opinions to my countrymen ; and on this consideration alone I undertake the invidious task of making disagreeable observations on the baneful tendency of a pamphlet, entitled, "Thoughts
 " on the Cause of the present Discon-
 " tents."

To the disgrace of human nature, and the plague of society, an able head and an honest heart are but too often separated. The pamphlet in question is written with great eloquence, acuteness, and art ; but its fine turned and polished periods carry with them a poison sufficient to destroy all the little virtue and understanding

standing of sound policy which is left in the nation. Whilst the obvious intent of this pernicious work is to expose the dangerous designs of a profligate junto of courtiers, supported by the mere authority of the crown, against the liberties of the constitution, it endeavours to mislead the people on the subject of the more complicated and specious, though no less dangerous, manœuvres of Aristocratic faction and party, founded on and supported by the corrupt principle of self-interest, and to guard against the possible consequence of an effectual reformation in the vitiated parts of our constitution and government; a circumstance much to be dreaded from the active exertion of a vigorous and enlightened zeal in the great body of the people.

The

The multitude, whose judgments are, more especially in matters of government, directed by the warm impulse of present injury, are too apt, in the scale of comparison, to regard past evils with an eye of partial complacency. The offences of a present possessor of power throws a favourable shade over the equally atrocious crimes of his designing predecessors. The grievances attending his government, which are but the bitter consequences, or rather the fruits of seeds sown by his ancestors, are regarded as springing immediately from the particular policy of his administration; and thus the causes of political evils being never traced up to their sources, it is not surprising that the generality of mankind are so unfortunately divided in their opinions concerning their cure.

It is often retorted on speculative reasoners in policy, that not having been engaged in the practical parts of administration, they are apt to run into refinements incompatible with the gross and vicious nature of human affairs. Did these practical gentlemen ever attempt to prove that their speculative antagonists grounded their positions on a false mistaken notion of a non-existing virtue in mankind, there would be some weight in their assertions: but as all systematical writers on the side of freedom plan their forms and rules of government on the just grounds of the known corruption and wickedness of the human character, I shall be apt to suspect with the vulgar * (when on the authority merely of their experience, without argu-

* Vide Thoughts on the Cause of the present Discontents, p. 50.

ment or proof, statesmen thwart regulations drawn up on principles of public good, and to counteract particular interest) that their opinions are solely formed on sinister views.

That the modes of government which have ever been imposed on credulous man, have been all of them not only deficient in producing the just ends of government, *viz.* The full and impartial security of the rights of nature; but that they have been rather formidable and dangerous cabals against the peace, happiness, and dignity of society, is not owing to any moral impossibility in the forming a system which should answer these just ends. The wisdom of man is fully adequate to the subject. It would be unworthy the idea we ought to form of God, to suppose him so capricious a being

being as to bestow that high degree of wisdom and ingenuity, which we often see displayed, in regulating the more trifling concerns of life ; which we often see displayed in the support of tyrannic and destructive systems ; and the not rendering him adequate to regulations so necessary to his security, happiness, and perfection ; and without which, all the benevolent designs of Providence in his creation appear to be almost totally frustrated.

To plan a form of government perfect in its nature, and consequently answering all its just ends, is neither morally impossible in itself, nor beyond the abilities of man, but it is the work of an individual. The generality of mankind are too fond of accustomed establishments, however pernicious in their na-

ture, to adopt material alterations ; and this propensity has ever afforded full opportunity to the interested to reject every part of reformation which tends effectually to establish public good on the ruins of private interest.

In tracing the origin of all governments, we find them either the produce of lawless power or accident, acted on by corrupt interest ; the same circumstance which attends the formation of government, attends what is called their reformation ; of this the history of our own country affords a melancholy example. In all the great struggles for liberty, true reformation was never by the ruling party either effected or even intended ; the flaws in the Revolution system left full opportunity for private interest to exclude public good, and for a faction, who by their struggles against former tyrannies
had

had gained the confidence of the people, to create, against the liberties and the virtue of their trusting countrymen, the undermining and irresistible hydra, court influence, in the room of the more terrifying, yet less formidable monster, prerogative.

A system of corruption began at the very period of the Revolution, and growing from its nature with increasing vigor, was the policy of every succeeding administration. To share the plunder of a credulous people, cabals were formed between the representatives and the ministers. Parliament, the great barrier of our much boasted constitution, while it preserved its forms, annihilated its spirit; and, from a controuling power over the executive parts of government, became a mere instrument of regal administration. It would be invidious and
even

even tedious to detail the moral and political evils which the system of administration which took place at the Revolution, and which has been regularly, and with little alteration systematically carried on from that period to the present times, has produced : the destructive grievance of a debt of one hundred and forty millions, a grievance which operates powerfully and variously against public freedom and independence ; a strong military standing force, contrary to the very existence of real liberty ; an army of placemen and pensioners, whose private interest is repugnant to the welfare of the public weal ; septennial parliaments, in violation of the firmest principle in the constitution ; and heavy taxes imposed for the single advantage and emolument of individuals, a grievance never submitted to by any people, not essentially enslaved.

Had

Had any thing more than a mode of tyranny more agreeable to the interests of the Aristocratic faction, who took the lead in the opposition to the arbitrary administration of king James, been the probable consequence of the Revolution, that important circumstance in the annals of our country had never taken place.

The extension of popular powers have ever been regarded with a jealous eye by a misinformed and selfish nobility. To diminish the force of new acquired privileges, and as a bulwark to the party against the dreaded vengeance of a routed, though hardly subdued faction, the power of the reigning prince was to be strengthened by every diabolical engine which the subtle head and corrupt heart of a statesman could invent. The nation, instead of being the paymasters,
were

were to become the creditors of government. The larger the national debt, the stronger was supposed to be the operation of this state engine ; the more the people were beggared, the more it diminished their constitutional independency ; and the largeness of the revenue, necessary for the supply of so expensive a government, with the yearly interest to be paid to its creditors, it was foreseen would afford variety of excuses for levying exorbitant taxes on the public ; and thus the management of the revenue would give so large an additional power to the crown, as to make ample amends for the loss of a few idle prerogatives.

The wicked system of policy set on foot by the leaders of the Revolutionists in the reign of king William, and which
proceeded

proceeded perhaps more from fear of personal safety than from any very malicious intent against their country, was thoroughly completed under the administration of their sons; but whilst this state faction, who called themselves whigs, but who in reality were as much the destructive, though concealed enemies of public liberty, as were its more generous, because more avowed adversaries the tories, whilst they were erecting their batteries against those they termed inveterate Jacobites and prejudiced republicans, it never came into their heads, that they were ruining their own importance, and, consequently, rendering the crown strong enough to set all parties at defiance, to put them on their good behaviour, and to treat them with that contempt which is natural to a sovereign in the plenitude of independent power.

C

A timid

A timid prince, in the new establishment of sovereignty, will subject his own interests and inclinations to the interests and inclinations of the faction by whose efforts he was raised to power, and by whose influence he is supported in it; his stronger and more confirmed successors will be apt to regard such a dependence in no more favourable a light than as a state of splendid vassalage, and be tempted to make use of the superior advantages of their situation to throw off the fetters of former obligations.

That the loss of their power by his present majesty's having displayed the independent greatness of his situation, is the only grievance which a large faction in this country supposes to exist among us, and the only grievance they wish to see removed, has been generally surmised
by

by the jealous friends of liberty. That they should earnestly endeavour to conceal their sentiments from the eye of the public, it was natural to imagine; but that they should proclaim it to the world, and endeavour to argue mankind into hazardous exertions of opposition for their particular interests alone, is a consummate piece of indiscretion, which nothing could make us believe practical politicians to be guilty of, had we not been convinced to the contrary by the obvious tendency of the work intitled, "Thoughts on the Cause of the present Discontents," supposed to be written by a man whom we may justly esteem the mouth of the faction.

In a work where all the fetters laid upon public liberty are not only regarded with indifference, but treated as

necessary evils, rather to be supported than abolished, we cannot help smiling to hear the author with all the power of eloquence pathetically lamenting, as a man who had remotely felt something of the humiliation, the dependent, invidious, and mortifying state of that very immediate slave to an absolute monarch, a minister of state: we cannot, I say, help smiling to hear a philosopher and a politician lament the natural consequence of those very circumstances which he esteems necessary in government.

We cannot help wondering at the corruptness of the heart, and the deception of the head of the same writer, who, whilst he emphatically sets forth the tyranny growing from a trust too long continued

continued to parliaments †, absolutely disclaiming against the quick return of power

† A vigilant and jealous eye over executory and judicial magistracy, an anxious care of public money, an openness approaching towards facility to public complaint; these seem to be the true characteristicks of an house of commons; but an addressing house of commons and a petitioning nation; an house of commons full of confidence when the nation is plunged in despair; in the utmost harmony with ministers whom the people regard with the utmost abhorrence; who vote thanks, when the public call upon them for impeachments; who are eager to grant, when the general voice demands account; who in all disputes between the people and administration presume against the people; who punish their disorders, but refuse to inquire into the provocations to them: this is an unnatural, a monstrous state of things in this constitution; such an assembly may be a great, wise, and awful senate, but it is not to any popular purpose an house of commons.

This

power in the people's hands, on the shallow pretence of the horrible disorders attending

This change from an immediate state of procurement and delegation to a course of acting as from original power, is the way in which all the popular magistracies in the world have been perverted from their purposes : it is indeed their greatest, and sometimes their incurable corruption ; for there is a material distinction between that corruption by which particular points are carried against reason (this is a thing which cannot be prevented by human wisdom, and is of less consequence) and the corruption of the principle itself ; for then the evil is not accidental, but settled ; the distemper becomes the natural habit.

For my part, I shall be apt to conclude the principles of parliament to be totally corrupted, and therefore its ends entirely defeated, when I see two symptoms ; first, a rule of indiscriminate support to all ministers, because this destroys their very end as a controul, and is a
general

tending frequent elections, and the committing every three years the independent
gentle-

general previous sanction to misgovernment; and secondly, the setting up any claims adverse to the right of free election, for this tends to subvert the legal authority by which they sit.

They who will not conform their conduct to the public good, and cannot support it by the prerogative of the crown, have adopted a new plan; they have totally abandoned the shattered and old fashioned fortress of prerogative, and made a lodgment in the strong-hold of parliament itself. If they have any evil designs to which there is no ordinary legal power commensurate, they bring it into parliament; in parliament the whole is executed from the beginning to the end; in parliament the power of obtaining their object is absolute, and the safety in proceeding perfect; no rules to confine, no after reckoning to terrify: parliament cannot with any great propriety punish others for things in which they themselves have been accomplices.

gentlemen of the counties into a contest with the treasury. What was it which first gave rise to and increased these disorders to the present formidable pitch? but the lucrative prospect which a seat in parliament, in the present mode of corruption, gives for the enriching the representative, at the expence of his country and constituents; take away the cause and the effect will cease; take away from the representative, by a quick and thorough circulating round of rotation, every such lucrative and corrupt prospect

accomplices. Thus the controul of parliament upon the executory power is lost, because parliament is made to partake in every considerable act of government; impeachment, that great guardian of the purity of the constitution, is in danger of being lost, even to the idea of it.

Thoughts on the Cause of the present Discontents, p. 35. *et seq.*

of

of private interest, and the warm contention for seats in parliament, both on the side of government and individuals, will sink into a coolness which will reduce such elections to the quiet calmness of a nomination for parish officers. If triennial parliaments will not serve the turn, change the half, or the whole of your parliament yearly, and deprive your representatives of a corrupt and standing interest in the legislature ‡, by debarring every member of parliament of the capacity of re-election under a certain term of years.

‡ The depriving every member of parliament of a corrupt and standing interest in the legislature, by rendering them incapable of serving any sinister views of the court, must effectually destroy the venom of that influence which the author of the Cause of the present Discontents seems to think irremediable.

D

It

It certainly never ought to be regarded as a crime, to endeavour by every honest means to advance to superiority and power those of our own sentiments and opinions ; but at a time when our expiring liberties, when the corruption of every salutary principle in the constitution calls instantly and loudly for a speedy and effectual reformation, should the contention be reduced to mere endeavours to advance party or friends to superiority and power, the people, whose interests seem entirely out of the question, would act wisely to suffer the contenders to fight their own battles, without in any sense engaging in the dispute.

Equally averse is the author of the Cause of the present Discontents against every other constitutional proposition for the remedying the growing evils of our govern-

government, as against the orthodox principle of rotation ; a place bill would set the executive power at variance with the legislative, and hazard the forms of our excellent constitution. The forms of a constitution is sure of little advantage when its spirit is lost. But an independent parliament, the true parliament of the people, is intrusted with sufficient powers to keep the executive parts of the government in a subordination, which must prevent any possible infringement either of the form or the spirit of the constitution.

To correct evils which are allowed to be excessive, this mighty champion of the whig faction, the author of the *Thoughts of the Cause of the present Discontents*, proposes that the people, who are not to be trusted with any additional

or original powers adequate to the correcting the grievances arising from mistaken confidence, should meet in counties and in corporations to scan the conduct of their representatives, and to send, I presume, disregarded petitions to the throne for the dissolution of a body of men whom the very nature of their trust must render corrupt, and whose successors in office, such a trust continuing, must, from the very constitution of human characters, be equally treacherous and equally formidable.

A more extended and equal power of election, a very important spring in the machine of political liberty, is entirely disregarded by our author ; but he does not forget to flatter his sovereign with the hopes, that were his party once taken into favour, the purse of
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the people would be as prodigally sacrificed to every lust of capricious grandeur and expence, as it is at present supposed to be, to the venal machinations of state policy. || Such infamous flattery, could
it

|| Suppose, says the author of the Present discontents, we were to ask, whether the king has been richer than his predecessors in accumulated wealth since the establishment of the plan of favouritism, I believe it will be found that the picture of royal indigence which our court has presented, until this year, has been truly humiliating; nor has it been relieved from this unseemly distress but by means which have hazarded the affections of the people, and shaken their confidence in parliament. If the public treasures had been exhausted in magnificence and splendor, this distress would have been accounted for, and in some measure justified. Nothing would be more unworthy of this nation, than with a mean and mechanical rule to mete out the splendor of the crown. Indeed I have
found

it have any effect on a wise and just sovereign, was fitter for the royal ear than for public criticism. The public must consider moderation as the most useful virtue in a prince, and that a parliament fulfilling its duty will on no pretence whatsoever suffer more money to be raised on their constituents than is necessary for their defence, and the decent magnificence of their governors.

The disappointments produced by the treachery of leaders, after any sharp, obstinate, or dangerous opposition to government, is very pernicious to the freedom of society, by the languor which the want of confidence must necessarily introduce in popular exertions. It is for this reason found very few persons disposed to so ungenerous a procedure.

Thoughts on the Cause of the present Discontents, page 31.

that

that I would warn my countrymen from entering into any dangerous or even vigorous measures against the conduct of their present governors, without exacting a political creed from leaders, who, under the specious pretensions of public zeal, are to all appearances only planning schemes of private emolument and private ambition. I would have them exact some particular promises of real public service ; and be never persuaded out of this political truth, That as democratical power never can be preserved from anarchy without representation, so representation never can be kept free from tyrannical exertions on the rights of the people without rotation.

BERNER-STREET, OXFORD-ROAD,

MAY 7, 1770.

F I N I S.

